

AROUND THE CORPS IN BRIEF

Young Marines earn title in ceremony

MCLB, ALBANY, Ga. — During a ceremony held here, Dec. 6, 19 young men and women received a title that will give them cause to hold their heads a little higher and stick their chests out a little further. They received the title “Young Marine.”

The ceremony, held at the base theater, gave family and friends a chance to watch proudly as their child’s 13-week experience reached its pinnacle.

“This is the best day I’ve had since I started,” said Mercedes Willis, a 13-year-old whose loss of her father caused her attitude to change for the worst. “After today, I can look back and see all the things I’ve accomplished and how much I’ve changed.”

This sentiment was not uncommon amongst the graduates, but the parents seemed to have the highest level of satisfaction at the day’s events.

“I’ve seen a tremendous change in my daughter,” said Lynn Willis, who hoped the program would give her daughter a sense of hope again. “After the loss of her father, Mercedes was overcome by hate and lost her desire to do anything productive.”

While the Young Marines program is known for changing the attitudes and lives of children who have strayed from the path intended for them by their parents, there are also children involved who simply want to attend the program.

“I joined because I’m pretty sure I want to be in the military when I get older,” said Justin Lewis, who was meritoriously promoted during the ceremony.

OIF Marines honored during Outback Bowl

TAMPA, Fla. — Four Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran Marines were recognized at the 2004 Outback Bowl for their service to the country recently.

Corporal David Hixon, of Tampa, along with Lance Cpl. Curney Russell and Capts. Jaden Kim and Vernice Armour were honored during the half-time festivities.

This special recognition was an added value to the Marine Corps Recruiting Command’s second annual partnership with the Outback Bowl.

All of the veterans received a warm welcome, but the more than 65,000 fans erupted for the hometown hero —Hixon— whose unit fought its way from Kuwait through southern Iraq, all the way to the streets of Baghdad.

“I grew up here in Tampa, and never figured I’d be on the sidelines at the Outback Bowl,” said Hixon, a member of the 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion.

Also honored during halftime ceremonies was Russell from the 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. Russell gained fame for his role in the rescue of seven American POWs in Sammara, Iraq. Kim, a naval flight officer from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, was honored as the first Asian American female Marine to fly in combat. Armour, an AH-1W Cobra attack helicopter pilot from Marine Light Helicopter Attack Squadron 169, is the Marine Corps’ first African American female pilot.

Some of the most visible presence of the Marine Corps started with the pre-game parade through Tampa’s historic Ybor City district on New Year’s Eve. Participating in the parade were the MCRD Parris Island Band and the 6th Marine Corps District’s red “Hummer” vehicle, which drew loud cheers and applause from the more than 50,000 people gathered. Drawing some of the largest cheers was the 2004 Team Marines Racing NASCAR show car, driven by Shannon Epps.

2003 tax statements to be posted on Web site

HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS, WASHINGTON — With April 15 right around the corner, it’s time for most Americans to gather financial documentation for filing taxes.

Instead of waiting for paper copies of W2 Wage and Tax Statements to arrive via traditional methods, service members, retirees, and DoD civilian employees can now view and print these documents online via myPay. The Web site is an automated system that circumvents the paper form process and allows individuals immediate access to their pay account information.

I thought these things could fly ...



MCAS MIRAMR, Calif. — A CH-46E is towed to a hangar by Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 Marines at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. The Marines are conducting thorough inspections and maintenance on aircraft as they prepare for a possible deployment to Iraq.

“myPay is easier and quicker than waiting for a hard copy of your W2,” said Carol Garcia, a public affairs specialist for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. “W2s are scheduled to begin coming out (in December) on myPay. Normally, service members wouldn’t see a hard copy of their W2s until late January.”

Currently, military annuitants, DoD civilians, and military retirees can get their 2003 tax statements on the Web site. Active duty Marines and Reservists and active duty Sailors will be able to print theirs by the middle of the month.

The Web site provides access to much more than just tax statements. Individuals can access certain pay items such as Leave and Earnings statements and make changes to their pay account. A few of the items that can be managed via myPay are federal and state taxes, savings allotments, the Thrift Savings Plan and savings bonds.

The Web site is a safe and secure system so you don’t need to worry that “someone will be able to hack into the system” and access your information, Garcia said. Requiring individuals to use a browser with Secure Socket Layers protocol with 128-bit encryption software, and using a combination of a PIN number and the individual’s social security number help to protect the security of information on the site.

To get a myPay PIN number, click on “Need a PIN” on the Web site, then follow the directions to fax the request for a PIN.

The Web site can be found at <https://mypay.dfas.mil>. For additional assistance, call the Centralized Customer Support Office at 1 800 390-2348.

MEU personnel help with holiday deployment

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — While many people spent time with loved ones during the holidays, several Marines and sailors currently deployed with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) rolled up their sleeves and picked up shovels to help clean up a local Christian cemetery during a port visit in Dubai Dec. 24.

The clean-up project was a one of several community relations projects the MEU has conducted during port visits. This particular project was considered special because this was the second time the 13th MEU has helped clean the same place. In November, Marines and sailors cleaned the cemetery under the hot-bright sun, shoveling sand off the graves weathered by the region’s sand storms.

According to Rev. Steven Miller, who assists in organizing the volunteer work, the build up of sand is caused by wind carrying it over the short wall on the eastern and southern ends of the cemetery.

“When we get (heavy) winds in the winter, the sand blows right in,” said Miller. “Within three days we can get up to six feet of sand.”

For some who volunteered for the second time, the clean up was a chance for them to see if their work from the last visit was maintained.

“I wondered before going whether

it was going to be how (we left it) or if it had improved,” said Cpl. Rico Negron, Command Element legal chief, 13th MEU (SOC).

According to Negron, the locals maintained and cleaned up a lot of the mess. The first time they came to the cemetery its walkways were buried under sand and most of the graves were covered up, he said.

“Now the walkways are visible,” he said. “You can see a lot of the graves. There was a big improvement.”

According to Miller, the Marines and Sailors did an outstanding job.

Miramar Marine selected 3rd MAW NCO of the Year

MCAS MIRAMAR, Calif. — In 1997, a 19-year-old girl moved from her hometown of Ocotlan Jalisco, Mexico, to the United States with her father, bringing a valuable homeland work ethic, but only a limited English vocabulary. Little did anyone know that this girl, Norma Garcia, would emerge six years later as Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year for the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

Garcia, a sergeant serving the Wing as an aviation operations specialist, enlisted in the Marine Corps’ Delayed Entry Program one year after arriving in the states and after finding out that her father couldn’t afford to send her to college.

Shortly after graduating recruit training, Garcia started standing out as a stellar Marine at her military occupational specialty school. Although only a private first class at the time, her instructors noted her work ethic.

“At school the barracks manager was impressed by how I always tried to apply everything I learned in boot camp to the fleet,” Garcia said. “He made me his scribe, and I was in charge of assigning rooms and giving new Marines tours of the base.”

Following Garcia’s graduation from MOS school, she was selected for an overseas tour in Okinawa, Japan, before being transferred here.

It wasn’t long after Garcia arrived here that her superiors started noticing the same traits in her that her barracks manager noticed early in her career.

“First and foremost she’s an NCO so she has a positive influence on many Marines everyday, not just the people she works with,” said Gunnery Sgt. Butch Trail, who nominated Garcia for the Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 3 NCO of the Quarter for the fourth quarter.

Now, Garcia, who has earned her jump wings, will be trying her hand at serving as a Marine Combat Training Instructor at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

Marine For Life set to continue expansion

MCAS MIRAMAR, Calif. — The Marine For Life program assists Marines who have been honorably discharged from the service. The goal is to help Marines as they transition from the Marine Corps back into the community.

period of active duty service to establish a network with local businesses and individuals in the area who have an interest in helping former Marines. They spend a lot of time receiving phone calls and working with Marines one-on-one or in small groups to help them answer any questions they may have. They spend time expanding the network by attending meetings with companies and individuals, as well as attending job and career fairs.

Fennell said although reserve Marines may be assisting with transitioning Marines, in no way is the program intended to be another recruiting tool to keep Marines from leaving the service. Interested individuals can visit the Web site at [www.marineforlife.com](http://www.marineforlife.com).

Winners of MCCS Bash announced

MCB QUANTICO, Va. — Reserve Maj. Kevin Coughlin, on active duty at Cherry Point, N.C., was the lucky winner of the 2003 Marine Corps Community Services Football Bash Grand Prize, a five-day/four-night, all expense paid trip for two to Houston to attend Super Bowl XXXVIII, valued at over \$7,000.

This fall, MCCS clubs and restaurants across the Corps sponsored the MCCS Football Bash in an effort to get Marines into MCCS facilities for a little fun, camaraderie, and football. In all, MCCS club and restaurant patrons submitted more than 60,000 raffle entries.

Official event sponsors included Brew City, Bank One, Coors Brewing Company, Tyson Foods, Coca-Cola, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, and Hubert.

As the winner of an installation Football Bash raffle, Coughlin was eligible for a one in 21 chance at the Grand Prize. His name was drawn during a raffle Dec. 19 at HQMC, Personnel and Family Readiness Division, aboard MCB Quantico. Sgt. Maj. Ronnie Edwards, Personal and Family Readiness Division, drew the winning ticket.

The Grand Prize winner also received four nights lodging at the Comfort Inn Suites, an Enterprise Rent-A-Car rental car, two tickets to the Johnson Space Center, a \$50 gift certificate for Landry’s restaurants, and \$500 spending money.

Gunnery Sgt. Linda Patterson, Camp Allen, won the first place prize of \$1,000, and a golf bag, leather jacket and sports chair donated by the sponsors. Staff Sgt. Lonnie Buckner, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., won the second place prize of \$500 and a leather jacket, a golf bag, and sports bag donated by sponsors.

Compiled by the MCRD Parris Island Public Affairs Office.

Just add water ...



MCAS MIRAMAR, Calif. — A Marine from crash fire attaches a hose to the P-19 fire truck. Military and local civilian medical units in the San Diego area came together to conduct a mass casualty drill aboard Marine Corps Air Station Miramar after battling the California wildfires last fall.